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DEPT PASS USAID TO LAC/RSD, LAC/SAM, G/ENV, PPC/ENV
USDA FOR FOREST SERVICE: MICHELLE ZWEEDE
INTERIOR FOR DIR INT AFFAIRS: K WASHBURN
INTERIOR FOR FWS: TOM RILEY
INTERIOR FOR NPS: JONATHAN PUTNAM
INTERIOR PASS USGS FOR INTERNATIONAL: JWEAVER
JUSTICE ENVIRONMENT NATURALRESOURCES: JWEBB
EPA FOR INTERNATIONAL: CAM HILL-MACON
USDA FOR ARS/INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: GFLANLEY
NSF FOR INTERNATIONAL: HAROLD STOLBERG

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: U.S. FOREST SERVICE COLLABORATION ADVANCES BRAZILIAN FOREST
FIRE MANAGEMENT

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SUMMARY

¶1. Following a two-week workshop lead by U.S. Forest Service (USFS) experts, the Brazilian Center for Forest Fire Fighting and Prevention (PREVFOGO/IBAMA) agreed to take the lead in forming a National Wildfire Coordination Group, which will be responsible for elaborating and implementing a Brazilian Incident Command System. Improvement of resource efficiency and constructive inter-agency engagement in forest fire fighting and prevention are critical needs for Brazil, a country where forest fires currently account for 75% of its greenhouse gas emissions. USFS continued collaboration and assistance with institutional strengthening will be critical to moving these plans forward. END SUMMARY

HISTORY OF USFS COLLABORATION IN BRAZIL

¶2. Since 1991, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Brazilian Government have had an excellent collaborative program focused on exchanging experiences with fire management, sustainable forest management, forest administration and the conservation of biodiversity. The Brazilian Natural Resources Agency (IBAMA) has been a primary USFS partner since an implementing arrangement (MOU) was first signed in 1992. The collaboration has produced beneficial results for both countries and established long-lasting professional and personal relationships between Brazilian and U.S. natural resource managers and scientists.

¶3. In the spring of 2007, the Brazilian Center for Forest Fire Fighting and Prevention (PREVFOGO/IBAMA) requested assistance from the USFS to facilitate Brazilian formation of a program similar to the U.S. National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). This group would provide the umbrella coordination for all agencies involved in forest fire management in Brazil, in order to maximize resource

efficiency and build constructive inter-agency engagement. NOTE: PREVFOGO is responsible for protecting the country's natural protected areas from fire; when a fire takes place in an Indigenous Reserve, for example, the agency responsible (FUNAI) does not have a coordinated incident response plan with any other agency but instead relies on help from PREVFOGO. This lack of a structured response has seriously affected the efficiency of fire fighting and has led to unnecessary human and ecological losses. END NOTE.

14. The threat of increased forest fires due to land use change and global climate change, predicted to decrease rainfall patterns and increase temperatures, is a serious concern for Brazil, which is currently ranked as the fourth highest greenhouse gases emitting nation (75% due to fires). NOTE: Despite the GOB having recognized the importance of forest fire fighting and prevention, the recently launched National Climate Change Plan focuses on reducing deforestation without explicit reference to fighting fires. As was debated throughout the workshop, deforestation is a more interesting theme for media attention. END NOTE.

DEVELOPING A BRAZILIAN INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM

15. Between September 29 and October 10, three USFS experts (Jacque Buchanan - Forest Supervisor of the Lincoln National Forest in New Mexico; Paul Schmidtke - Chief for Cooperative Fire Programs for the US Forest Service in Washington DC; and Hugh Safford - senior vegetation ecologist for the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region) traveled to Brazil to discuss strategies for wildfire prevention and inter-agency fire coordination in a workshop setting, with the following specific objectives: 1) analyze the infrastructure and organization of Brazilian agencies involved in forest fire fighting ; 2) provide information on the organization

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and operation of the USFS forest fire management program; and 3) assist Brazilian partners in developing measures to improve the organization, standardization, and efficiency of the Brazilian forest fire fighting and prevention system. The Regional Environmental HUB Office assisted with workshop organization and implementation; USAID/Brazil financially supported the workshop.

16. The workshop brought together representatives from different Brazilian governmental and non-governmental institutions to debate the appropriate structure for forest fire fighting and prevention in Brazil. The targeted outcomes of the workshop were twofold:

--To develop a standardized, integrated, interagency three-tier system for forest fire fighting and prevention in Brazil, at Federal, State, and Local levels; and

--To develop a standardized forest fire incident response system.

17. An Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized, on-scene, all-hazard incident management concept used in the United States, as well as in other countries worldwide. ICS creates a flexible, scalable response organization providing a common framework within which people can work together effectively, providing standardized operating procedures and responses, with reduced potential for miscommunication. ICS staff may be drawn from multiple agencies that do not routinely work together.

NEXT STEPS: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

18. At the conclusion of the two-week workshop, a path forward was established that will lead the way toward improved Brazilian inter-agency coordination. As part of the time-line drafted, PREVFOGO agreed to define participants for the three-tiered, inter-agency coordination group by December 2008. In May 2009, PREVFOGO is planning to arrange for signature of an Interagency Agreement officially creating a National Wildfire Coordination Group. The Coordination Group is expected to create and/or strengthen State and Local coordination groups by May 2010. NOTE:

Nearly every Brazilian state has a coordination group established, but only Minas Gerais state seems to be advanced enough to coordinate a forest fire response efficiently. END NOTE.

¶9. According to the time-line, the Brazilian National Coordination Group will set standards for a Brazilian Incident Command System (BICS) by December 2009. In May 2010 the roles within this BICS will be well-defined and standardized nationwide; a data bank of personnel qualified to carry out each role will be created and accessed nationwide.

¶10. In addition, by May 2010, a standardized incident reporting system will be established using a Web platform that will enable posting of information on fire and shared data.

¶11. COMMENT: USFS's continued active support of these efforts would increase the prospects for Brazil to meet the ambitious deadlines the GOB has set for itself. Post believes that it would be valuable to have technical experts from the USFS return for the First Meeting of the Brazilian National Wildfire Coordination Group in May 2009 in order to identify what type of assistance and institutional strengthening will be needed to create the Brazilian Incident Command System. END COMMENT.

SOBEL